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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, DRL

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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: FRESH DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

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11. (SBU) Summary. Post is receiving reports of demonstrations in parts of the Central Highlands, beginning on April 11. Participants are largely ethnic minorities, including Degar Protestants, who are reportedly demanding better land-expropriation and compensation policies, more appropriate government zoning plans, and religious freedom and independence for ethnic minorities. Sources report various, sometimes conflicting, numbers of demonstrators. Although official media has been silent so far, a Government of Vietnam (GVN) contact confirmed the demonstrations. Reports of GVN reactions, troop deployments and arrests are vague and imprecise and have not yet been independently confirmed as the situation unfolds. Post continues to track the situation. End Summary.

Numbers and Locations

12. (SBU) Although various contacts report differing numbers of demonstrators, it appears that the groups are made up of between 40 and 100 ethnic-minority protestors each. Several reliable contacts confirmed reports that these groups staged demonstrations in five villages in Plei Sung Kat, Ia Kla (Duc Co District), Ia Le (Chu Se district), Dakre village (Chu Pah district), Tam Hai village in Daklak from April 11, 12 and 13. The demonstrators appeared to be mostly women and children. One contact said that the demonstrations were slowly spreading south to Dak Lak province, and making the GVN's response to the situation "more complicated." Our contacts dismissed Montagnard Foundation Inc. (U.S.-based advocacy organization) claims that there had been up to 7,000 protestors as "not accurate."

Land disputes fuel the protests?

13. (SBU) Reports suggest that the demonstrators gathered and went to the communal people's committees and police stations to ask for better land compensation, more transparent land-expropriation and zoning policies, and, according to some sources, religious freedom and the establishment of a Degar "republic". However, reports from post contacts differ as to whether land disputes initially ignited the protests, and whether the issues of an "independent Degar state" and religious freedom were involved. Contacts in the Protestant house church community shared that several demonstrators were Protestants "who call themselves Degar Protestants," but did not so far include any followers from any of the recognized and registering denominations in the Central Highlands.

14. (SBU) Mr. Tran Viet Hung, GVN Chief of Staff of the Central Highlands Development Committee (an advisory agency to the

central GVN on Central Highlands economic, social and securities policies) confirmed that demonstrations took place but dismissed them as "not of significant scale." Mr. Hung pointed out that the demonstrators were upset because they "lacked accurate information on GVN land policies," and that they peacefully returned home after listening to explanations from the proper authorities.

Arrests and troop deployments

15. (SBU) One source reported that plainclothes policemen and soldiers were monitoring ongoing protests in each village, but did not act openly. The same source reported that the GVN deployed two divisions to the Central Highlands and the Ministry of Public Security has asked Major General Nong Van Luu to return to Gia Lai to calm the situation. Other contacts either do not have information or refute reports that "divisions of troops" are being moved into the Central Highlands to crack down on the protests. There is general agreement, however, that at least four people have been detained, reasons unknown. Mr. Hung from the Central Highlands Committee also implied that necessary actions to maintain order had been taken towards those "instigators that received instructions from elements in foreign countries via cell phones." Names of the detainees remain to be confirmed.

16. (SBU) Comment: Post is reaching out to contacts in this remote area of central Vietnam, as well as seeking additional information on those detained. However, details will be hard to come by and it will be some time before a clearer picture of the situation emerges. The mention by several sources of demonstrators receiving instructions from "overseas" will fuel the suspicions of some in the GVN that those outside Vietnam, particularly from the United States, are attempting to interfere in domestic affairs and to instigate civil unrest. While sources differed on the specific issue that sparked the demonstrations, the protests can be seen a sign of general

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discontent over GVN policies in the Central Highlands, rather than a direct challenge to GVN authority. However, post is concerned about reports of troops being deployed to the area and will follow events as they unfold. End comment.
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